



NATIONAL EXECUTIVE

Motto: "Speak without Fear or Prejudice but with Ethics"

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PRESS RELEASE

A SOLEMN CALL FOR THE PROTECTION OF THE TACUGAMA SANCTUARY FROM LAND GRABBERS AT THE WESTERN AREA PENINSULA

The National Secretariat of the Sierra Leone Debating Council is deeply troubled by the ongoing deforestation at the precincts of the Tacugama Sanctuary which is orchestrated by some lawless and unscrupulous land grabbers around Regent/Bathurst community. It could be recalled that frantic efforts had been made in the past by Government and other Environmental stakeholders to nip in the bud this unfortunate situation. Sadly, there has been rapid recurrence of the unlawful act of extermination or deforestation of the protected areas.

On the 8th July 2021, a delegation of officials from the National Protected Area Authority (NPAA) once again intervened to halt the illegal land grabbing activities at the Tacugama Sanctuary. No sooner the NPAA officials left than the land grabbers regrouped and return to continue their plundering of the protected forest areas. This is becoming increasingly worrisome for the National Security of the nation.

The Tacugama Sanctuary is at the heart of the Western Area peninsula forested zone which houses the dam that supplies clean water to the Regent/Bathurst Community and its immediate environs. The unabated activities of land grabbers such as brushing, burning and erection of shanty structures will not only adversely affect the supply of clean water to the community but it will further endanger the species (Chimpanzees) inhabiting the environment and by extension negatively affect the eco-touristic potential of the country. The Tacugama Sanctuary is a national asset in our environmental and wildlife conservation drive. For over 30 years, under the watchful eyes of Mr. Bala and team, the Sanctuary has been the number one tourist destination in the country as it provides the much needed impetus for a diversification of the economy with specific focus on eco-tourism.

In the constant wake of environmental threats and anomalies, the Manager of the Sanctuary, Mr. Bala has wielded indomitable spirit to rally citizens on the need to reaffirm our national commitment to take ownership and protect the Sanctuary. His stewardship in our national environmental conservation has made him a proud holder of multiple international awards and the most important national award, Order of the Rokel 2021.

The hazards of environmental degradation can't be overemphasized. Sierra Leone is marked among the most vulnerable countries on the brink of Climate Change. Our individual strides in protecting the environment, will be minimally potent if it lacks a collective and holistic approach. To this end, we are once again reminded of the August 14th 2017 Mortomeh Mudslide and Flooding Disaster which claimed many lives and wrecked untold sufferings on lives and livelihoods. A stark reminder of the evils of preventable disaster.

Today, we continue to face the same unbridled challenge that poses huge national security threat if we don't take collective action. On the 1st May 2021, the Sierra Leone Debating Council in collaboration with the Sierra Leone We Want dovetailed with the Management of the Tacugama Sanctuary to raise public awareness on Environmental Conservation in a well-televised discussion at the Tacugama Sanctuary. During the event, a team of fine speakers made excellent presentations on the responsibility to preserve the environment amidst present day challenges.

In conclusion, the National Secretariat of the Sierra Leone Debating Council wishes to draw the attention of the media houses, the government, local and international environmental conservation partners and general public to the undermentioned recommendations in order to salvage or remedy the rampant Environmental degradation at the Tacugama Sanctuary and its immediate environs.

- The government should declare a National Security Emergency on Land Grabbing at its Protected Areas.
- The government through the National Protected Area Authority (NPAA) should reinforce the deployment of forest guards with the presence of military taskforce or personnel within the Tacugama Sanctuary protected areas in order to enforce surveillance and forestall further infiltration of land grabbers.
- The Residents of Regent/Bathurst Community through the Parliamentary representative and Councillor must take full responsibility to protect the Sanctuary through the reinforcement of the presence of the local taskforce.
- The Ministry of Lands, Ministry of Energy and Water Resources, Freetown City Council, Office of National Security, Environmental Protection Agency, National Protected Areas Authority (NPAA) and the Ministry of Tourism and Culture should work in unison to devise a long lasting strategy for the protection of the environment.

The Sierra Leone Debating Council will continue to work with the Management of the Tacugama Sanctuary in order to monitor the situation closely with a view to reinforcing various avenues of campaign including media engagement, lobbying, and protests.

Long live the protection and preservation of the environment!

Long live the Government and people of Sierra Leone!

God bless you all!

Best Regards,



Mohamed Salami,
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Sierra Leone Debating Council.



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Cc:

Press Secretary- Office of the President
Office of National Security
Ministry of Tourism and Culture
Ministry of Energy and Water Resources
Ministry of Lands
Environmental Protection Agency
Freetown City Council
National Protected Area Authority (NPAA)
The Management of Tacugama Sanctuary